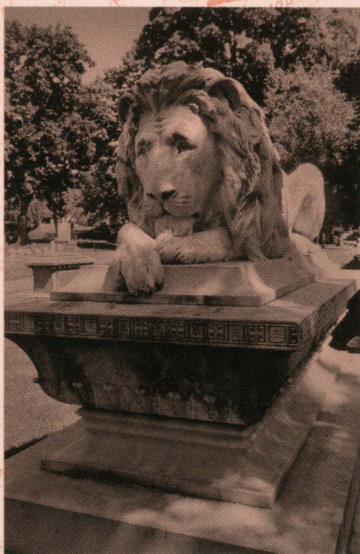


# Lowell Cemetery

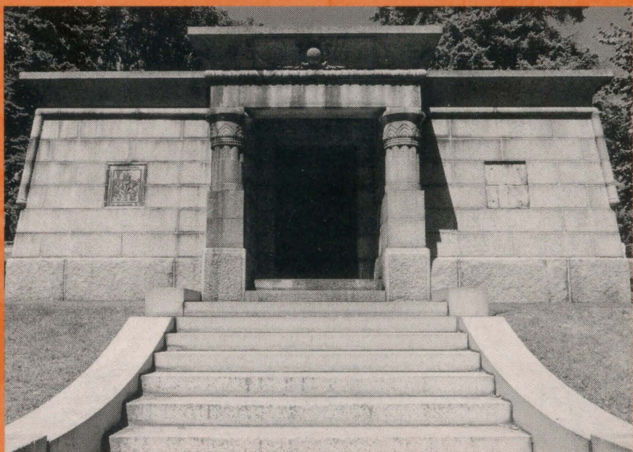
National Register  
of Historic Places



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LOWELL HISTORIC BOARD

The Lowell Cemetery is an important, early example of the “rural” cemetery movement of the mid 19th century. Established in 1841, it is the fourth of its kind in the United States. The cemetery is the final resting place for countless members of the community including mayors, governors, and members of Congress. It includes many outstanding examples of markers and monuments by local architects as well as sculptors and carvers of local and national acclaim.



OLIVER  
SPENCER  
LOUISA MARY WHEELER  
DIED FEBRUARY 20 1885



Right:  
Lawrence  
Street  
Gate,  
ca. 1890s  
Pollard  
Memorial  
Library



## Early Development

The Lowell Cemetery was established in 1841 and is an important, early example of the “rural” cemetery movement of the mid 19th century. This romantic movement began in the United States with the establishment in 1831 of Mt. Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge and was based on gardening and landscaping principles in vogue in France and England. Naturalistically landscaped sites, taking advantage of vistas from steep elevations and rolling terrain with curving paths, were accentuated by the use of varied ornamental features.

Several cemeteries were already in use in Lowell prior to the establishment of the Lowell Cemetery. Among the earliest was the School Street cemetery of 1826. In 1832 an acre of land off Gorham Street was donated to the City, with half for use as the Old English Cemetery, and half for the burial of Catholic residents (later named St. Patrick's Cemetery). Several other early burial grounds existed, some of which were in areas included in other communities prior to expansion of Lowell's boundaries. These earlier burying grounds include the Pawtucketville plot, Clay Pit, Woodbine, Hildreth, Mammoth Road, and Clark.

Left:  
Receiving  
Tomb

In 1840 a “Committee of Five” began planning for the development of a rural, privately-owned cemetery. This effort was as much an attempt to create public, open space as it was to create additional burial sites. Led by James Carney, an officer of the Lowell Bank and the

Lowell Institution of Savings, others active in the planning included Charles Hovey, manufacturer of Father John's Medicine, and Oliver Whipple who owned a gunpowder mill across the Concord River from the cemetery. Whipple eventually served as cemetery president for almost three decades.

The committee selected a 43 acre lot on Fort Hill owned by Oliver Whipple. Whipple had previously purchased the land for \$5,000 with the intent of using it for cemetery purposes. He deeded the lot to the Proprietors of the Lowell Cemetery in 1841 and the \$5,000 needed to purchase the land was quickly raised by the sale of 500 burial lots at \$10 each. Each lot was 300 square feet, allowing for 10 burials.

Civil engineer George Worcester designed the cemetery, creating a plan that was largely executed and visible today. Burial lots were randomly assigned to the original subscribers. Those who were dissatisfied with their assigned lot were able to pay \$5 to choose a different location. The cemetery was dedicated at a ceremony held June 20, 1841 with clergy from many of Lowell's churches participating and thousands of spectators attending.

## Architectural Development

The Lowell Cemetery, with its hilly terrain overlooking the Concord River, its multiple varieties of horticultural specimens, and its physical isolation from Lowell's industrial center are all characteristic of the rural cemetery movement. The natural setting was enhanced by Worcester's plan and its use of curving avenues and paths sympathetic to the site's terrain. He named the avenues after prominent individuals such as Washington and Franklin and the paths for trees and shrubs such as Spruce, Laurel, and Wisteria. Worcester also planned a series of ponds for the cemetery, the last remaining one being filled in for additional greenspace in 1906.

Right:  
Currier  
Monument



As the cemetery's many monuments were erected, it acquired its architectural significance as the location of works by local architects, and sculptors and carvers of local and national acclaim. Works such as the Talbot Memorial Chapel (1885), Superintendent's Office (1887), and Receiving Tomb (1891) were designed by Lowell and Boston architect Frederick Stickney who

also designed several major Lowell public buildings including the Butler School (1882), Moody School (1891), Pollard Memorial Library (1893), Lowell High School (1893), and the Lawrence Street firehouse (1892). Brookline architect C.W. Painter was responsible for the design of the Lawrence Street gate (1862).

The entire cemetery is scattered with markers and monuments from all periods of its development because subscribers could pay an additional fee to select their lot location. In addition to the varied dispersal of markers



**Right:** from all periods, the cemetery  
**Gibby** features markers, monuments, and  
**Monument** mausoleums illustrating many styles  
of design. While the earliest markers  
were often slate and simple in form  
and ornament, the use of marble and  
granite increased rapidly after the  
establishment of the cemetery.

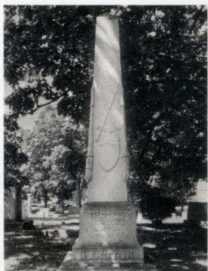


Notable examples of many historic architectural styles  
can be found in the cemetery including Gothic Revival,  
Egyptian Revival, Neo-Classical, and Art Deco.

Examples of many different types of funerary architec-  
ture can be found including outstanding mausoleums as

well as tombs built into hillsides and  
sarcophagi. Sculptures and elaborate  
monuments reflect the romanticism  
of the period, with figures of draped  
women, angels, lions, lambs, tree  
stumps, urns, and sleeping children  
all reflecting various themes, both  
personal and universal.

**Right:**  
**Marston**  
**Obelisk**



**Right:** The female form was frequently used  
**Rogers** in funerary sculpture, often in the  
**Cross** form of an angel, and nearly always  
dressed in classical robes. Among the  
angels is the Gibby monument  
(ca. 1890). The obelisk is another  
common monument type. These varied  
from the completely unadorned  
or minimally ornamented to the lavishly detailed.  
Examples include the Marston obelisk (ca. 1867) with its  
inscribed base and crossed swords. Several notable crosses  
can also be found in the cemetery with the granite  
cross marking the grave of John Jacob Rogers and Edith  
Nourse Rogers (1925) among the most prominent.



One of the finest structures in the cemetery is the  
Receiving Tomb. Dedicated to the memory of Eli Hoyt  
Shedd and given to the cemetery by his parents, this  
Egyptian Revival style tomb was completed in 1891.

## The Rural Cemetery Movement

The Lowell Cemetery is an outstanding example of a “rural” cemetery. Like many communities during the mid 19th century, the founders of the Lowell Cemetery followed the model of Mt. Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge. Established in 1831, Mt. Auburn was the first rural, or garden, cemetery in the United States. Its development was inspired by the romantic philosophy of the day and by trends in European cemetery design. In turn, Mt. Auburn provided the inspiration for the rural cemetery movement which swept cities across the eastern part of the country.

Rural or garden cemeteries provided oases of rustic, naturalistic landscaping in rapidly expanding cities. They combined richly carved and handsomely designed monuments, mausoleums, and other funerary art and architecture with dramatic landscapes of rural vistas, lush vegetation, and varied terrain.

The founders of the Lowell Cemetery envisioned it as much a park as a cemetery. The establishment of the cemetery pre-dates the first public parks in Lowell, the North and South Commons in 1845. It was not uncommon for residents to take walks and carriage rides through the cemetery and consequently it became a popular recreation area for those seeking to escape the city and experience nature.

The Lowell Cemetery was the fourth of its kind in the United States when it was established in 1841. Following Mt. Auburn in 1831 came Laurel Hill (1836, Philadelphia) and Green-Wood Cemetery (1837, New York).



## James C. Ayer's Lion

Among the most impressive monuments in the Lowell Cemetery is the sarcophagus of James C. Ayer. Made of Italian marble, the sarcophagus is capped with a life-sized lion sculpted by Englishman Price Joy.

J.C. Ayer was a pioneer in the field of patent medicine. Ayer's patent medicine laboratory and manufactory was located on Middle and Market Streets in downtown. The company's Cherry Pectoral, Sarsaparilla, and Hair Vigor were world renowned. Ayer was also involved with railroads, owned stock in mills in Lawrence, and had lumber and manufacturing interests in Florida. The town of Groton Junction was renamed Ayer in his honor after he donated money for construction of a new town hall there.

From 1854 until his death in 1878, Ayer lived in the Stone House on Pawtucket Street. Built in 1824, the structure served as a tavern and inn for many years, counting Davy Crockett among its guests when he visited Lowell in 1834. The Greek Revival, rubble stone building served as a shelter for young women and children, an orphanage, and a convent after Ayer's death. The structure has served a variety of uses important to the history of Lowell and remains a dominant focal point along Pawtucket Street.

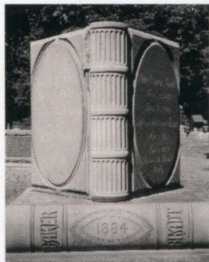




**Right:**  
**Ebert**  
**Chair**



**Right:**  
**Baker/**  
**Bradt**  
**Monument**



The cemetery is also home to several less traditional forms used as monuments. Among these is the armchair at the grave of Horace Ebert, owner of a harness shop (ca. 1890s). The granite sculpture depicts Ebert's upholstered leather armchair with carved dog heads at the arms and an open book on the seat. Also unusual is the Baker/Bradt monument (1884) consisting of a large granite book lying on the ground as a base, with an open book standing upright on it.

Several nationally-known sculptors were commissioned to design some of the cemetery's finest works. The studio of Daniel Chester French designed "The Mill Girl" monument at the grave of Louisa Wells (1906). Executed in Tennessee marble by French's associate Evelyn Longman, the bas-relief represents an angel comforting an exhausted millworker holding a bobbin.

**Right:**  
**Bonney**  
**Monument**

Frank E. Elwell and Frank Bacon teamed as sculptor and architect of the Bonney monument (ca. 1920). The statue, entitled "New Life," is a bronze figure of a classically robed woman and it is set in a Neo-Classical structure framed by a pair of Doric columns. Elwell's studio was in New York City where he also served as curator of sculpture and Ancient Egyptian Art at the Metropolitan Museum.



**Left:**  
**Ayer**  
**Lion**

## **The National Register of Historic Places**

The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the Nation's resources worthy of preservation for their architectural, historical, or cultural value. The National Register was established in 1966 as a list of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects significant in American history, architecture, archeology, and culture. Buildings that have contributed to the development of the Nation and the Commonwealth, which are over fifty years old and not altered significantly, may be eligible.

Listing on the National Register does not place restrictions or limitations on the use, alteration, or disposition of private property. Listing does provide some protection from adverse action due to Federal or State funding, permitting, or licensing. Additionally, certain property owners who rehabilitate income-producing certified historic properties may be eligible for federal tax credits.

## **The Lowell Historic Board**

Established by state statute in 1983, the Lowell Historic Board serves to preserve and protect the historic and architectural resources of the Downtown Lowell Historic District while encouraging economic development and tourism in the District's historic setting. As the City of Lowell's historic preservation agency, the Board also maintains the city's inventory of historic structures and sites. The Board also provides technical assistance and information on preservation to property owners citywide in addition to publishing educational and outreach materials and sponsoring several workshops and events throughout the year.



## Resources

*For additional information about the Lowell Cemetery, other National Register or historic sites in Lowell, and historic preservation, contact:*

**Lowell Historic Board**

J.F.K. Civic Center

50 Arcand Drive

Lowell, MA 01852

(978) 970-4270

[www.historiclowell.net](http://www.historiclowell.net)

*For additional information about the National Register, contact:*

**Massachusetts Historical Commission**

220 Morrissey Boulevard

Boston, MA 02125

(617) 727-8470

[www.state.ma.us/sec/mhc](http://www.state.ma.us/sec/mhc)

**National Register of Historic Places**

National Park Service

1849 C Street, NW

Room NC 400

Washington, D.C. 20240

(202) 343-9536

[www.cr.nps.gov/nr](http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr)

*For information on architectural styles, preservation, and restoration, try:*

**A Field Guide to American Houses**

Virginia and Lee McAlester

New York: Alfred A. Knopf

(1985)

**The Old House Journal Guide to Restoration**

Patricia Poore, editor

Old House Journal Corporation

(1992)

*For additional information on Lowell architecture and the Lowell Cemetery, try:*

**Lowell Then and Now: Restoring the Legacy of a Mill City**

Charles Parrott with

Gretchen Sanders Joy

Lowell Historic Preservation

Commission (1995)

**Mill and Mansion: A Study of Architecture and Society in Lowell, Massachusetts 1820-1865**

John Coolidge

New York: Columbia University Press (1942)

**Mourning Glory: The Story of the Lowell Cemetery**

Catherine Goodwin

Lowell Historical Society (1992)

This brochure is based upon the National Register of Historic Places registration form for the Lowell Cemetery (Kim Withers Brengle with Betsy Friedberg, 1998) on file at the Lowell Historic Board, the Massachusetts Historical Commission, and the National Register of Historic Places, Washington, D.C.

Historic images courtesy of Pollard Memorial Library and the University of Massachusetts Lowell Center for Lowell History.

Written by Stephen Stowell  
Photography and design by  
Higgins & Ross  
Printed by Sullivan Brothers Printers

1999, 2003 by the Lowell Historic Board  
Kevin P. Broderick, *Chairman*  
Stephen Stowell, *Administrator*

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This brochure has been financed in part with Federal funds from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, through the Massachusetts Historical Commission, Secretary of the Commonwealth William Francis Galvin, Chairman. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of the Interior, or the Massachusetts Historical Commission.

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